

FAITH AND POLITICS INSTITUTE

JONATHAN KOZOL ON EDUCATION

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MALE SPEAKER: -- in the lobby of the United Methodist building at 100 Maryland Avenue N.E. on the 30th and one in a couple of weeks about child labor. And we hope people come to that and to the reception if you possibly can.

And, also, for those of you who are Congressional staff especially we at the Faith and Politics Institute do a number of things around racial justice and reconciliation, including getting people on Capitol Hill to talk more deeply and honestly and openly about the dynamics of that.

We've done that with members of Congress for about three years now but we have not done it in a focused way with Congressional staff. And we're going to be launching a series of conversations specifically for staff on racial issues. If you fit that category, please pay attention

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1 to this yellow card and I think there's a  
2 yellow flyer to that effect.

3 I know we're all waiting to hear  
4 from Jonathan Kozol rather than from any of  
5 the rest of us. So we will get to that in  
6 just a moment. But, Carrie Lavelle (?),  
7 where are you? Are you in here, or you  
8 outside? Bring Carrie in.

9 Carrie Lavelle is the program  
10 director of the Faith and Politics  
11 Institute, and I'm going to ask her to give  
12 our invocation.

13 MS. LAVELLE: Let us pray. We  
14 thank you because this is a day that you  
15 have made. We will continue to rejoice and  
16 be gladdened. We thank you for being our  
17 sustainer. We thank you for being the  
18 supplier of our needs.

19 We thank you for this time of  
20 sharing. I ask that you open up our hearts  
21 and minds so that we will hear, see, and  
22 feel what is being said, increase our

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1 sensitivity to your voice, and give us  
2 clarity of cause and empower us to do what  
3 we're called to do collectively and  
4 individually for the children of the world  
5 and all God's people. Amen.

6 MALE SPEAKER: We knew when we set  
7 up this event that we would need a larger  
8 room than those that we usually hold events  
9 in in the Capitol and that's clearly the  
10 case. We did not anticipate that we might  
11 be next door to something but I'm sure that  
12 John can command their attention ---- lower  
13 some of these walls. I imagine that it's a  
14 reception in which everybody's talking to  
15 everybody else, and ---- be heard.

16 To the degree that Jonathan Kozol  
17 needs an introduction, which I'm sure all  
18 ----, I want to remind you that he is a  
19 prolific author, that he has been evoking  
20 the conscience of the nation for decades now  
21 on issues that deal especially with children  
22 and children in poverty.

1           Several of his books have been  
2 searing in calling forth our moral  
3 obligation for what we ought to be doing and  
4 those of us who have read those books have  
5 recognized that from the start.

6           The last two books differ in that  
7 it isn't only a call to moral action that  
8 comes out of a sense of ----. It is also a  
9 call to respond that comes out of an  
10 invitation to connect with children whose  
11 spirits are obviously so rich and so alive  
12 and have so much to give us as well as  
13 anything that we may have to give them.

14           Jonathan delivered a speech in June  
15 of 1995 before 2,000 of the nation's  
16 publishers in which he said I believe the  
17 questions that we should be asking about  
18 justice and injustice in America are not  
19 chiefly programmatic, technical, or  
20 scientific. They are theological but I  
21 disagree with those who think we should be  
22 asking questions of theology primarily to

1 those who live in poverty. I think we need  
2 to ask these questions of ourselves.

3 Ignoring those questions ----  
4 damages us as well, perhaps even more, than  
5 it does the children about whom Jonathan  
6 writes.

7 Jonathan, thank you for being with  
8 us here today.

9 (Applause)

10 MR. KOZOL: Thanks to ---- and  
11 everybody on your staff who helped to make  
12 this possible. And also my thanks to  
13 Clifford Gaddy (?) from the InterFaith  
14 Foundation ---- good friends of mine and  
15 seem to bring a lot of wisdom to bear on  
16 some of the big issues that we're facing  
17 now.

18 And where is my new friend from  
19 Australia, from the ----. Glad to see you  
20 ---- one of the countries whose pedagogy has  
21 influenced me most in my career.

22 I had a very good talk this

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1 afternoon with Congressman John Conyers, who  
2 I've admired for years. He's a real hero of  
3 mine. So meeting with him personally was a  
4 tremendously moving experience for me.

5 I feel sometimes like an old  
6 weatherworn statue that's been in the ----  
7 all these years and I've run into another  
8 one almost as old as I am and it gives me  
9 courage and a feeling of solidarity. One  
10 thing I always worry about when I come to  
11 Capitol Hill and come to Washington is the  
12 tendency I've always fear in this city to  
13 water down anything I believe and make it  
14 more acceptable to accommodate the  
15 conventional wisdom, which is always  
16 positioned by our ---- newspapers as  
17 somewhere in the middle ---- like a shy  
18 creature of the woods ---- like a bashful  
19 little hamster that always wants to live in  
20 the middle of anything that's going on.

21 And so it has a terrible effect on  
22 me. ---- people in Washington ---- and

1 always when I come here, think that I have  
2 very low blood pressure, and that I'm a very  
3 mild and sweet person and I'm actually not.  
4 And I can get angry and I sometimes wish I  
5 could be angry when I come up to the Hill  
6 but there's this tremendous sense of  
7 reverence for public office and respect for  
8 leaders and it's amazing how eloquent I can  
9 be when I'm arguing with members of the  
10 Senate at a distance, when I'm home in  
11 Massachusetts, and how unctuous and polite I  
12 am in their presence. Power does have that  
13 effect on all of us.

14 So I'm going to do my best tonight,  
15 even though most of you are not powerful  
16 people. You're just ordinary mortals like  
17 me. I'm going to try my best to be  
18 irreverent and not to be too accommodating.  
19 I have to spend next weekend with a number  
20 of the members of the United States Senate,  
21 and that's going to be a harder challenge.  
22 So I'll view this as practice in saying what

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1 I actually believe.

2 In order to explain why I have the  
3 beliefs I do I've got to give you a very  
4 quick sense of where I come from and what  
5 I've been doing all my life.

6 As a few of you know, I started out  
7 back in 1964, 37 years ago, as a fourth-  
8 grade teacher in the segregated public  
9 schools of Boston, Massachusetts. Can you  
10 all hear me ---- in the back? Good.

11 I never intended to become a  
12 teacher. I'd gone to Harvard College. I'd  
13 majored in English literature, which I  
14 loved, studied with wonderful teachers, and  
15 spent my last two years immersed in  
16 Elizabethan poetry with a great scholar  
17 named Harry Montague Levin (?) and learning  
18 to write myself with a wonderful poet named  
19 Archibald MacLeish ----. And largely  
20 because MacLeish was fond of me and he was a  
21 distinguished man I was awarded a Rhodes  
22 Scholarship to Oxford.

1 I didn't like Oxford. You know, I  
2 had spent four years at Harvard, where  
3 everybody pretends to be British and even  
4 Oxford was ---- for me. I never liked it,  
5 to be honest, and perhaps there was  
6 something in me which said it's time to grow  
7 up. Perhaps I didn't like it because it was  
8 precisely what my parents expected of me.  
9 Perhaps that was why I rebelled. I don't  
10 know.

11 So I will say that my first winter  
12 holiday in Paris I always think this is an  
13 extraordinary coincidence, but some of the  
14 ministers would say it was intended. The  
15 very first time I walked into a bookstore in  
16 Paris I bumped into Richard Wright, the most  
17 important living Black American writer at  
18 the time, and soon met other great American  
19 authors who were living in Paris at the time  
20 and one of them essentially took me in and  
21 fed me and took care of me for the winter.

22 Then when spring came I discovered

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1 all these wonderful young American women  
2 from Smith College who were spending their  
3 junior year abroad so I never went back to  
4 Oxford. I stayed in Paris for four years,  
5 learning to write.

6 And when I came back to the United  
7 States my father was getting very worried  
8 about me. My dad, like anybody's father,  
9 was ambitious for me and he worked hard to  
10 send me to Harvard and I guess he was very  
11 proud of me when I won my Rhodes  
12 Scholarship.

13 And he thought the next thing I  
14 would do would be to run for the United  
15 States Senate or something like that or at  
16 the very least by the age of 27, which I was  
17 now, that at the very least, I would be the  
18 governor of ---- state.

19 And instead I was just hanging  
20 around Harvard Square as young men tend to  
21 do and promptly would have yielded to my  
22 father's pressure to go back and go to law

1 school or business school, something  
2 practical, had it not been for the civil  
3 rights movement, which was sweeping the  
4 nation that summer. That was the early  
5 summer of 1964.

6 Thousands of wonderful young  
7 people, black and white, all over the  
8 country were meeting at their colleges on  
9 their campuses and then in certain centrally  
10 located campuses in Ohio, like Oberlin, to  
11 plan what became one of the great children's  
12 crusades of all time, Freedom Summer,  
13 Mississippi 1964, in which thousands of them  
14 were going to pour down into Alabama and  
15 Georgia and South Carolina, especially  
16 Mississippi, to try to break the back of  
17 apartheid in this nation.

18 And the first three young people  
19 who went ahead of everyone else were boys.  
20 They really were boys, just young guys,  
21 maybe 19, 20, 21 years old. Two were white,  
22 one was black, and they disappeared.

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1           Some of you are old enough to  
2     remember that. Others have read it in  
3     history. They disappeared and they  
4     disappeared in this little town called  
5     Philadelphia, Mississippi. And there was a  
6     lot of fear across the nation about what had  
7     happened to them because it was known that  
8     the Ku Klux Klan was very powerful in that  
9     part of Mississippi. And the fear proved to  
10    be justified about six weeks later when  
11    their bodies were found, murdered by the  
12    Klan and buried in the mud in Philadelphia,  
13    Mississippi.

14           Well black people have been lynched  
15    forever in the South and no one ever paid  
16    attention. But now it was black and white  
17    together and it just mesmerized the nation.  
18    And I will admit that for the first time I  
19    was struck by the power of what was going on  
20    in the South and by the nobility of  
21    sacrifice of those young people.

22           And at that moment in defiance of

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1 everything my father wanted for me I made a  
2 really drastic decision. I went down to the  
3 subway station in Harvard Square. If any of  
4 you know Cambridge that was the end of the  
5 line in those days. And I rode to the other  
6 end of the line, which was Roxbury, the  
7 black ghetto of Boston, ---- poor,  
8 segregated ghetto. It still is.

9 And I came out of the train and I  
10 walked into a church, an A.M.E. church, a  
11 black church, and I just walked up to the  
12 preacher and said may I be of use and he  
13 said as a matter of fact you can. He said  
14 you're going to learn that not all the  
15 bigotry is down South in Mississippi. We  
16 face it right here in Boston, too, and we're  
17 starting a Freedom School this summer to  
18 teach our kids. Can you teach ----?

19 And I said no, I went to Harvard.  
20 I don't know anything useful at all. And he  
21 said -- Congressman Owens, it's wonderful to  
22 see you. Bless you. One of my dear

1 friends, Congressman Owens from New York.

2 I said but I'll learn. And he said  
3 we'll teach you and they taught me. A black  
4 church taught me how to teach ----. That's  
5 where I learned. And I loved it so much,  
6 that when September came I didn't want to  
7 give the kids up. I thought they're my  
8 children now. You know that feeling.

9 And so I walked into the Boston  
10 School Department and I said hey, I'm going  
11 to be a teacher with this big goofy smile on  
12 my face. I'd never heard of certification,  
13 you see, but I thought I was, like, Cecil  
14 Rhodes' gift to the children of Boston.

15 And they said where did you go to  
16 college. I said Harvard. And they said  
17 then you can't be a teacher because you  
18 haven't been certified. And I said there  
19 must be some way I could teach. And they  
20 said well, you can be a sub. I said why  
21 not. I'll be a sub.

22 So I became a substitute teacher

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1 for the Boston schools and let me tell you  
2 something. That was the hardest thing I  
3 have ever done in my life. Getting a Rhodes  
4 Scholarship was easy. That was like a  
5 social legacy for me. That was easy.

6 Getting up in the morning and  
7 leaving my familiar world and going to these  
8 poor neighborhoods and standing up in front  
9 of a bunch of kids I'd never seen and trying  
10 to bring some dignity and honor to the  
11 school day for them when I knew nothing  
12 about teaching, that was the toughest thing  
13 I've ever done.

14 The first time I ever taught I  
15 taught kindergarten and I was honestly  
16 petrified. I was just terrified of ----.  
17 They had big classes, 35 children. I lived  
18 with these 35 ---- gerbils ---- morning.  
19 And I didn't know what to do with people  
20 that size ---- but I survived. And I went  
21 on to teach in the Boston public schools as  
22 a fourth-grade teacher for the full year.

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1 I was then hired to teach -- I went  
2 from the poorest to the richest. I was then  
3 hired to teach in the most affluent, most  
4 progressive, most enlightened public school  
5 system in New England, the public schools of  
6 Denton, Massachusetts, in the year in which  
7 a very small but elegantly designed school  
8 integration program was beginning.

9 It still exists. It doesn't get  
10 much attention. So I had the opportunity of  
11 going from the worst kind of impoverished,  
12 underfunded, dilapidated, segregated school  
13 to one of the most beautiful schools in  
14 America in which I saw black and white  
15 children for a brief moment sitting together  
16 at that table of brotherhood which Dr. King  
17 spoke about. It was the only time in my  
18 life I've ever seen his dream realistically  
19 fulfilled.

20 And in one way or another I've been  
21 working with low-income kids, black and  
22 Latino children, ever since, the past 7 or 8

1 years, almost 8 years now, in New York City  
2 in the South Bronx.

3 In all I've been up in the Bronx  
4 about 225 times now to talk with mothers,  
5 fathers, preachers, and teachers who face  
6 challenges that I couldn't even dream of 37  
7 years ago when I was a young teacher. It's  
8 so much harder now.

9 The kids I visit with live in a  
10 neighborhood called ----, the poorest  
11 section of the South Bronx. And despite  
12 some of the upbeat stories that you'll see  
13 in the newspapers from New York the South  
14 Bronx remains the poorest congressional  
15 district in America and ---- is its poorest  
16 neighborhood.

17 The little ones I write about as  
18 recently as last year, and I know this from  
19 talking to countless families there, their  
20 families were living on an average income of  
21 \$10,000 a year. That was a typical income  
22 in that neighborhood.

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1 I have wealthy Harvard classmates  
2 who live on the Upper East Side of Manhattan  
3 who spend \$10,000 a year to garage their  
4 car. Imagine that.

5 The little ones I know are among  
6 the most medically underserved children not  
7 just in the United States but anywhere in  
8 the developed world. In one of the medical  
9 capitals of the nation one-quarter of the  
10 children in this South Bronx neighborhood,  
11 live with chronic asthma. They're wheezing  
12 all the time.

13 They have to carry around these  
14 little pocket pumps -- asthma ---- we would  
15 call them. The little pumps. They're all  
16 the same with a yellow pump. And the  
17 commodity is so badly needed in that  
18 neighborhood and so many parents have been  
19 knocked off Medicaid.

20 You know, you're not supposed to be  
21 thrown off Medicaid but in New York Mayor  
22 Giuliani in his eagerness to anticipate the

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1 severity of federal policies didn't simply  
2 cut people from AFDC but also cut them  
3 automatically from food stamps and Medicaid  
4 as well.

5           So many of these people don't even  
6 know that they qualify for Medicaid. And  
7 these little ones depend on asthma inhalers,  
8 which are often sold on the streets. A drug  
9 dealer I know, a guy who -- actually, a very  
10 likable man, just in the wrong profession, a  
11 guy who sells drugs on Third Avenue, New  
12 York, told me that asthma inhalers are more  
13 valuable than heroin. He sells them on the  
14 street. Isn't that extraordinary, New York  
15 City, of all places.

16           About a quarter of the little ones  
17 I know see their fathers only when they  
18 visit them in prison. About a quarter of  
19 the daddies in this neighborhood are away in  
20 jail, because of the brutally unfair,  
21 racially loaded ---- that we have in the  
22 United States.

1           Unemployment is very, very high in  
2       this neighborhood. I did my own informal  
3       survey in this part of the South Bronx and I  
4       found that approximately 70 percent of the  
5       men had no real jobs.

6           Now, you can bet if you don't have  
7       a real job you're going to find some other  
8       way to earn some money to feed your  
9       children. And as a result Riker's Island,  
10      the prison of New York City, is now the  
11      largest penal colony in the world.

12           Twenty thousand inmates out there,  
13      men, women, and children. There are babies  
14      out there. There are so many women out  
15      there there's a nursery. I visited that  
16      nursery. It's not a bad nursery ----.  
17      There are mothers who plead with the state  
18      or with the city not to release them from  
19      prison until their baby is born because they  
20      get better care at Riker's Island often than  
21      they can get back in the South Bronx.

22           Don't think Riker's Island is some

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1     mysterious, distant place. Every time any  
2     of you fly over La Guardia Airport you go  
3     right over it. You're looking right down in  
4     Riker's Island right to the right of the  
5     plane.

6             Many of the little ones I know are  
7     hungry at the end of the month. The priests  
8     I know who run soup kitchens, food pantries,  
9     tell me that the needs have doubled and  
10    tripled in the past three years. A lot of  
11    the kids I know have seen homicides.

12            One of the little ones in my new  
13    book lost his brother last year. On Martin  
14    Luther King Day his brother was stabbed in  
15    the heart right opposite the church and  
16    died.

17            Most of these kids have lost  
18    relatives to AIDS. In the neighborhood  
19    there's such total destitution and such  
20    dreadful health conditions and such low  
21    education levels among parents. Less than  
22    25 percent of the children in the

1 neighborhood are admitted to the underfunded  
2 Head Start program. That is a travesty.

3 Every one of you who have any role  
4 in government should be ashamed that  
5 three-quarters of these children, the  
6 poorest of the poor, are excluded even from  
7 the meager ---- Head Start, that very small,  
8 modest ---- for the child.

9 And all these kids attend, as you  
10 would expect, profoundly segregated schools.  
11 Now, on this topic for a moment, because I'm  
12 not telling anything new that distinguished  
13 Congressmen will ---- here tonight ---- with  
14 this, but I talk about it a lot, because I  
15 have eyes and I can see and I go into these  
16 schools and it's like seeing one of those  
17 famed photographs from Mississippi or from  
18 Alabama in the 1940s.

19 There's no white children in the  
20 school. You look around you. There's no  
21 white kids. Every child is black or brown.  
22 I talk about this all the time and I call it

1 segregation. Well, some of the  
2 conservatives in Washington attack me for  
3 this. There are some very severe  
4 conservative intellectuals in this city at  
5 places like the Heritage Foundation.

6           You know those charming people  
7 there and they don't like my work very much  
8 and they're not very gentle in the way they  
9 fight. They fight to kill ----. I have  
10 plenty of principled conservatives as  
11 friends but the people at Heritage  
12 Foundation and similar places are not  
13 principled.

14           And they ---- issues. The way they  
15 do it is they say I don't have enough  
16 statistics in my book. They said ----  
17 they'll first flatter with you false praise.  
18 They'll say Jonathan seems like a nice guy.  
19 He's well-intended. That's their favorite  
20 adjective for liberals. He's well-intended.

21           But, they say, the trouble with his  
22 writing is he only writes about things he

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1 knows, a problem they do not face.

2 And ---- and I'll give them  
3 statistics. So I went ---- to some of my  
4 friends and I said I've got to get me some  
5 statistics. There are 11,000 children in  
6 the elementary schools which serve ---- in  
7 the southern Bronx, 11,000 elementary school  
8 children. Of those 11,000 last year exactly  
9 21 were white children. Why not create a  
10 mathematics ---- much longer ---- and that's  
11 a segregation grade of 99.8 percent,  
12 two-tenths of 1 percent ----.

13 Now, mark the difference between  
14 legally enforced apartheid in the South of  
15 50 years ago and socially and economically  
16 enforced apartheid in the North today. And  
17 I was in Philadelphia this morning. It's  
18 identical. The schools of Philadelphia,  
19 Cleveland, St. Louis, Detroit, Chicago, but  
20 it's the shame of the nation to see this in  
21 New York -- New York, the city that once  
22 sent its bravest children south to save the

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1 soul of Mississippi, now runs the nation's  
2 most unequal and most segregated public  
3 schools.

4 And do not doubt me when I tell you  
5 they're unequal. The inequalities are large  
6 enough so that even those who have no  
7 ideological axe to grind at all cannot  
8 consider ----.

9 If some of you have read my books,  
10 remember, children like this plump little  
11 girl, Pineapple, who dominates my new book,  
12 these sweet little kids who I write about  
13 get about \$8,000 a year spent on their  
14 public education in New York. That's the  
15 most that New York can afford to spend on  
16 them, \$8,000 a year. You lift up any one of  
17 these children in your grown-up arms and you  
18 plunk her down in simply a typical white  
19 suburb of New York, not the wealthiest, just  
20 a typical suburb, and she'd be getting  
21 \$12,000 a year.

22 Plunk her down again in the

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1 wealthiest white suburbs of New York which  
2 are out on Long Island, ----, towns like  
3 Great Neck and Manhasset, and she'd be  
4 getting \$18-22,000 spent on her public  
5 education every single year.

6           We say in my church, my synagogue  
7 -- I happen to be Jewish -- that all our  
8 children are of equal value in the eyes of  
9 God and in the eyes of God I'm sure they are  
10 but obviously not in the eyes of America.

11           In the eyes of America children  
12 come to our public schools with price tags  
13 on their foreheads based entirely on the  
14 accident of birth. The little ones I write  
15 about might be called inexpensive children,  
16 cheap children. They're \$8,000 babies. If  
17 you want to see an \$18,000 baby you have to  
18 go out to the elegant white suburbs.

19           It shouldn't be like this in a  
20 democratic nation. It's unacceptable. It  
21 must be changed and you must help to change  
22 it.

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1 I have been talking about this year  
2 after year, when I come up to Capitol Hill  
3 to Congress and ---- tell you how it breaks  
4 my heart the way ---- even if the Congress  
5 would absolutely agree with me, could  
6 somehow say well, don't worry, John. You're  
7 right, but we'll deal with this five years  
8 from now, ten years from now. It takes  
9 time.

10 Five years from now the little ones  
11 I know won't be children any more; ten years  
12 from now some of them will be dead.  
13 Patience is a virtue only for the people who  
14 are not in pain. For those who are it's an  
15 atrocity.

16 I ---- incremental acquiescence  
17 ----. I've always hated it. ---- campaign  
18 ---- is to resist it at least my own ----.  
19 And it's my moral obligation to remind all  
20 of you who studied history that our failure  
21 is not simply that we've trampled on the  
22 memory and moral symbolism of *Brown v. Board*

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1 of Education. It's worse than that. This  
2 nation hasn't even ---- up to the tarnished  
3 promises of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the  
4 "separate but equal" decision of more than a  
5 century ago.

6 That is the shame we live in and I  
7 have gone to public schools all the time and  
8 I look around me. I look at the faces of  
9 the children. And I just look at their  
10 complexion and I ---- to tell myself, that  
11 this is what Dr. King died for.

12 Well, I wish some of the members of  
13 Congress would speak out on this even if  
14 you're the only one who says it.

15 Anyway, despite all these things my  
16 new book actually is cheerful and it's  
17 cheerful because it's about the little kids  
18 before they've been dirtied by the world.  
19 They're so sweet and young still. They  
20 haven't yet been soiled by the knowledge  
21 that they're sitting ---- do not like them.

22 They'll learn that in a few more

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1 years when they become teenagers and then  
2 they'll become cynical and hard, many of  
3 them will. But for now they're tender,  
4 innocent, and sweet, lucky children in one  
5 way because a bunch of them go to a pretty  
6 good public school in the neighborhood, P.S.  
7 30. I always name good schools because they  
8 don't get enough credit these days.

9 P.S. 30 is a segregated school.  
10 It's a bitterly underfunded school.  
11 Teachers are badly underpaid. They lost one  
12 of their best teachers while I was writing  
13 my book because she couldn't live on her  
14 salary. She couldn't pay back her student  
15 loan and had to quit and go to the suburbs.

16 But despite these unacceptable  
17 inequalities it's a pretty happy place for  
18 children to go because of a wonderful  
19 principal. The principal is just one of  
20 these glowing human beings. She doesn't  
21 have any of the trendy rhetoric. She  
22 doesn't know any of the fashionable phrases

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1 that ---- on Capitol Hill about school  
2 reform.

3 She's just one of these solid human  
4 beings, the kind of person you'd want to be  
5 around on a day your heart was breaking, and  
6 as a result she's been able to attract and  
7 keep a pretty exciting faculty at that  
8 school.

9 And I go back there all the time  
10 just to recharge my battery. I love to be  
11 at the school and those teachers are really  
12 devoted teachers. You know something,  
13 Congressman Owens, the veteran teachers of  
14 that school, those who have been there, who  
15 have been teaching for 20, 25 years in New  
16 York and have advanced degrees, they can  
17 quit any time they want and go to Scarsdale  
18 and earn \$30,000 more. The fact that they  
19 don't is a real tribute to ----.

20 I get so sick of hearing people on  
21 Capitol Hill attacking teachers and I don't  
22 know how many members of the United States

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1 Senate who would work under the conditions  
2 inner-city teachers have to work under and  
3 for the meager pay that they receive. A lot  
4 of them are heroes, really good people.

5 At the end of school these kids and  
6 I now go around the block to a wonderful  
7 church, St. Anne's Episcopal Church. This  
8 priest is a truly rare human being. Her  
9 name's Martha Overall (?). Martha is one of  
10 those lovely, unexpected apparitions that  
11 you come across sometimes in the bleakest  
12 places.

13 Martha had an unusual career. She  
14 was privileged. She grow up on the Upper  
15 East Side of Manhattan and went to fancy  
16 schools and went to one of those boarding  
17 schools in Virginia, I think, where wealthy  
18 girls used to learn how to -- I don't know  
19 what they learn, marry wealthy men, I guess.

20 But she was a good student and she  
21 got into Radcliffe College and she was  
22 smart. I can tell you a lot of dumb boys

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1 get into Harvard, and I knew plenty of them  
2 in my class, but dumb girls don't get into  
3 Radcliffe. I mean, you had to be smart and  
4 she was a good student at Radcliffe.

5 She studied with great teacher.  
6 John Kenneth Galbraith was her economics  
7 teacher. And she went on to law school and  
8 did well in law school. She came out of law  
9 school, and she was selected as the protege  
10 of one of the most famous trial lawyers in  
11 American history, Louis Nizer, a famous  
12 trial lawyer who was ---- more famous than  
13 John Cochran in our day, similarly known to  
14 everybody in America.

15 And Louis Nizer brought her into  
16 his firm and Martha had everything going for  
17 her. Here she was, a charming woman,  
18 attractive, too, a stylish young woman with,  
19 oh, smart things that she'd learned in  
20 college and all her social skills and a  
21 good, adversarial fighter. And she stayed  
22 in that profession. She could have gone to

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1 the Supreme Court or just been one of the  
2 wealthiest women in our country, a big-time  
3 corporate lawyer, or executive.

4 But in the middle of the 1980s it's  
5 interesting how ---- come close to home.  
6 She was privileged. And it wasn't just that  
7 she went to Radcliffe but her brother went  
8 to Yale ----.

9 You always feel that people like  
10 that are protected from all the griefs of  
11 the earth. But they aren't and in the  
12 middle 1980s her ---- brother that he was  
13 dying of AIDS. And so she went out to San  
14 Francisco where he lived and nursed him  
15 through the last year of his life. And the  
16 night that he died she had this dream. And  
17 Martha is very humble and self-effacing and  
18 she makes fun of herself all the time.

19 So she didn't tell this story as a  
20 moment of conversion as though she were like  
21 Paul on the road to Damascus, you know. I'm  
22 Jewish so I call him Saul.

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1           She didn't tell it that way, as  
2           though it was a big deal. She makes fun of  
3           herself. She says she had a dream, a  
4           beautiful dream, actually. She had a dream  
5           that Jesus appeared to her in her sleep, and  
6           that he was holding her brother in his arms,  
7           as in the Pietà, like that.

8           And Jesus looked at her and  
9           whispered when you wake up in the morning  
10          open the Bible and read what it says. And  
11          so she woke up the next morning and she  
12          opened the Bible, she said, to the page  
13          where Jesus said what he thought about  
14          lawyers.

15          So she went back to New York and  
16          gave up the law and entered the Union  
17          Theological Seminary and studied there with  
18          the great preachers, James Collum (?), Jim  
19          Forbes (?), the great preacher of Riverside  
20          Church.

21          And Martha learned the gospel at  
22          the feet of one of the teachers and when she

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1 was ordained, she asked for the poorest  
2 parish in New York. There she is ----.

3 Some of you will get to meet her in  
4 a couple of months when you come up to New  
5 York to visit with the Congressman ---- from  
6 New York.

7 The kids at St. Anne's are not all  
8 perfect saints and angels. I don't  
9 romanticize this story. They can be  
10 irritating, just like children everywhere.  
11 They're not poster children for the poor. I  
12 don't portray kids that way. That's easy to  
13 do but I don't do it.

14 In an infinite variety, however,  
15 they're very much like children anywhere  
16 else. They're gentle children trying to  
17 ---- and generous unfailingly to older  
18 people. They worry about me more than I can  
19 worry about them. And it's a ----  
20 turnaround but it happens all the time.

21 The first time I met the little boy  
22 Julio (?), who's the central figure in my

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1 new book, I said how old are you, Julio, and  
2 he says six, how old are you?

3 So I say I'm 60. He immediately  
4 crossed himself ---- and ran to the priest  
5 to tell how old I was. And then he came  
6 back and started patting me on the hand and  
7 said oh, Jonathan, I hope you ----.

8 And I've brought up friends to meet  
9 the children, not too many because you can't  
10 put children on display. I'm very, very  
11 careful about that. And some good friends  
12 who love children have asked me if they  
13 could come. Reverend Jesse Jackson came up  
14 once in what was a wonderful visit. It was  
15 the sweet side of this man you may not see  
16 in public sometimes, just a quiet, good  
17 listener. He just listened to the children  
18 and his eyes seemed filled with tears. It  
19 was a moving visit. The same thing happened  
20 when Mrs. Clinton, Hillary, came up to visit  
21 last spring.

22 It's interesting how public people

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1 seem subdued in the presence of the children  
2 as though they're in the presence of a  
3 mystery and I don't bring too many grown-ups  
4 up there. Of all the grown-ups I've brought  
5 up there with me the one that I think meant  
6 the most to the children, even more ----  
7 than Reverend Jackson did, to be honest, was  
8 a sweet man who is known to every one of you  
9 in this room. ---- love to spend a whole  
10 day ---- a man named Fred Rogers.

11 Mr. Rogers asked me if he could  
12 come up and meet the children. And he's so  
13 modest. He said do you think that would be  
14 intrusive? And to me it's so charming to  
15 think of Mr. Rogers worried about being  
16 intrusive.

17 And he went on ---- New York and  
18 ---- no limousines for Mr. Rogers who went  
19 on a train, the way I always go up, on the  
20 Number 6 train, got on the Lexington Avenue  
21 line, got on the train, went up in the  
22 neighborhood. ---- sounded ---- to me ----.

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1 One reason I guess I get along with the  
2 children so well is I see the world through  
3 their angle of vision and let me tell you  
4 riding a New York Subway with Mr. Rogers  
5 ----. I was more excited than spending an  
6 evening with ----.

7 And that was a sacred moment and it  
8 was so sweet to see the way people looked at  
9 you, you know. And it's as though you'd see  
10 the memory going back. They were trying to  
11 remember. What is that face and why does it  
12 make me feel good seeing ----? He's such a  
13 kind, kind presence in the world. He's  
14 probably the best-loved person in America.

15 We got off the train and I was  
16 worried well, maybe nobody will know who he  
17 is up here. You know, you read so much  
18 sociology, how they're different from us?  
19 You poison your mind long enough with ----  
20 bell curve ---- toxic ideology into your  
21 brain you'll actually stop to wonder if they  
22 are different, and maybe they won't even

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1 know a man like Mr. Rogers. Nonsense.

2 We came out of the train, we walked  
3 one block, and a truck driver came  
4 screeching to a halt, jumped out of his  
5 truck, a grown-up black man, kissed  
6 Mr. Rogers.

7 We went to the school and had a  
8 wonderful time. I always bring people like  
9 Mr. Rogers to the school to boost the morale  
10 of the teachers. We need to boost their  
11 morale. They're trying so hard.

12 And then after school we went over  
13 to St. Anne's Church and it was a little  
14 late and there were 80 kids there already.  
15 And Julio, this little boy, spots Mr. Rogers  
16 from across the room and he's a very honest  
17 little boy. If he doesn't like you he may  
18 try to kill you.

19 He's very hostile to some visitors.  
20 He doesn't like people who speak to him in  
21 sing-song. You know how some grown-ups  
22 think that's how you're supposed to speak to

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1 children? And he just turns his back when  
2 people do that.

3 But if he likes you he'll come  
4 right at you. He'll attack you ---- World  
5 War II attack mode, goes right at you. He  
6 dove right at Mr. Rogers straight across the  
7 room with his wings spread wide, the moment  
8 of collision, wraps them around him, kisses  
9 him on the forehead, looks him in his eyes,  
10 right up his eyes and in his sweetest voice  
11 ----.

12 And Mr. Rogers was so touched by  
13 that he ---- later ----. And ---- spent the  
14 rest of the day, Julio and the others,  
15 worrying about Mr. Rogers' health because he  
16 looked tired and he had a lot of gray hairs.  
17 And they had a big argument later about how  
18 many gray hairs did he have ----.

19 And he's sweet. He doesn't seem to  
20 mind. And they do the same with me.  
21 They'll climb all over me. Sometimes when  
22 I'm sitting down ---- so small that in order

1 to reach my hand she has to stand on a chair  
2 next to me. And she stands on the chair and  
3 she studies my hair and every time she finds  
4 a gray hair she says uh-oh and then she  
5 looks in my ears, in my nostrils, and she  
6 studies my teeth like I was a horse and she  
7 ----.

8 Sometimes the children ask me about  
9 ---- a lot of ---- in that neighborhood.  
10 ---- when their fathers get taken away.  
11 Those ---- fathers riding ---- 84 people in  
12 the neighborhood were arrested at dawn.  
13 Some were innocent, some probably weren't,  
14 but a lot of daddies disappeared that night.  
15 Imagine the next day. A lot of children  
16 will ask me to pray with them for their  
17 father. Julio has done that many times. I  
18 think his father was in prison the whole  
19 time ----.

20 Sometimes they'll ask me to pray  
21 when their mother's sick or when their  
22 grandma is in the hospital. They pray when

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1 an animal has died. A lot of the children  
2 they love animals, just like anybody else  
3 would. They love dogs and cats.

4 But dogs don't live long in that  
5 neighborhood. You don't see many old dogs  
6 in that neighborhood. They seem to die  
7 early. They freeze to death, they get  
8 beaten, or there's just no food, and the  
9 mother has to make a terrible decision to  
10 feed their children instead of feeding their  
11 pet and so they let the pet go.

12 A lot of animals die. The children  
13 ---- pets ---- arms after they've died ----  
14 as to the burial ---- a lot of dog burial  
15 places ----. There's one dog I loved who  
16 used to live under her desk in the church.  
17 And she would say, the children would say,  
18 ---- 7 years ago. He died last summer. I'm  
19 so sorry ---- asked to see the dog and ----  
20 died before ---- this wonderful, pleasant  
21 dog with big ears. He used to sit on her  
22 desk ---- reporters to interview her, the

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1 dog would move, sitting between them. And  
2 the reporter ---- they have to ---- I liked  
3 that dog. And she let me give ---- food and  
4 I was touched by that.

5 But the children bring things like  
6 a dead pigeon to Mother Monica that ----  
7 pigeon that has to be buried. These are  
8 sweet children. They are not ---- any of  
9 that ---- toxic sociology. These children  
10 are as sweet as the child or the daughter of  
11 any senator or congressman or president.  
12 These are pure and beautiful little kids at  
13 this point in their lives. They're still so  
14 clean and pure.

15 And sometimes they'll ask me to  
16 pray when their ---- dies. While I was  
17 finishing my last book, *Ordinary*  
18 *Resurrections*, the book was virtually done.  
19 And there is a first grade at the school  
20 that I loved, at P.S. 30, that I love. And  
21 I came in there and the teacher was sobbing  
22 her heart out and it was because one of her

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1 little boys had burned to death the week  
2 before in a fire.

3 A lot of needless fires in that  
4 neighborhood. The terrible, terrible  
5 frequency with which children of color,  
6 black and Latino children, die of  
7 unnecessary fires in America and it's a kind  
8 of passive genocide. Nobody intends it. We  
9 just don't enforce the fire code laws. We  
10 don't enforce the safety laws in  
11 neighborhoods where children's lives don't  
12 matter to us very much because the  
13 sociologists have already told us that these  
14 kids have low IQ and won't add to our  
15 economic productivity and nobody intends it.  
16 We just let it happen so they die.

17 This little boy was an adorable  
18 little boy. He was a little artist and the  
19 teacher spent the whole day after school  
20 between ---- beautiful pictures ---- he gave  
21 it to the teacher. He said I love you,  
22 Teacher. He wrote it on there. He gave

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1 ---- and he died in a fire, a total tragedy  
2 because he escaped the fire. He had gotten  
3 out and his whole family had escaped. I  
4 guess it was the middle of the night. And  
5 then you know how little children think  
6 their stuffed animals are real? And he got  
7 frightened because he left his teddy bear  
8 and he was afraid his teddy bear would burn  
9 to death.

10 So he ran back in the building when  
11 his father wasn't looking and nobody was  
12 watching, thinking he could save his teddy  
13 bear. And I guess he was on the second or  
14 third floor ---- his bedroom. He couldn't  
15 get out. And so as the children said of it  
16 later the boy and the bear died together.

17 But when they'd ask me to pray with  
18 them I was really reluctant at first. And  
19 the reason I was reluctant was partly  
20 because I'm Jewish, and these are devoutly  
21 Christian children and St. Anne's is an  
22 Episcopal Church and ---- Episcopal liturgy

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1 is ---- jokes. She loves to ----. She says  
2 they believe in at most one god.

3 (Laughter)

4 MR. KOZOL: And this is the  
5 Episcopal church and they believe in a lot  
6 of complicated stuff which I don't believe  
7 in.

8 So at first I was afraid to pray  
9 with the children. And I said to Mother  
10 Margaret, Margaret, I don't think I'm  
11 entitled to pray with them. And she said  
12 you ----. She teased me and she said you  
13 can't get off with that excuse.

14 And then I realized the real reason  
15 I was afraid to pray with them was a little  
16 deeper than that. It wasn't just the  
17 difference in denomination. It was a  
18 difference in style.

19 I had been deeply religious when I  
20 was a little boy, when I was a little kid.  
21 I went to the synagogue and I had a  
22 wonderful rabbi, a great rabbi ----.

1                   And my real religion, to be honest,  
2                   was my grandmother, my ---- great-  
3                   grandmother. I called her my Old Testament  
4                   grandmother in Russia ---- was and is a  
5                   deeply religious woman. And that was my  
6                   religion when I was little.

7                   But I lost it all when I went to  
8                   Harvard College and I want to explain why  
9                   because I think many of you had undergone a  
10                  parallel experience. Or perhaps not so much  
11                  the people ---- chose to be with us in this  
12                  room tonight.

13                  When I was at Harvard the boys  
14                  wanted very much to be sophisticated and  
15                  sophistication meant intense rationality.  
16                  It meant you didn't accept anything you  
17                  couldn't see. It also meant a kind of  
18                  sophisticated urbanity. It meant ironic  
19                  detachment from the world. It meant a kind  
20                  of imitative, British amusement with the  
21                  foibles of the world, the sort of ---- you  
22                  were getting in "The Talk of the Town" in

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1 New Yorker magazine or the ---- diary column  
2 in the New York Times of the day ----, sort  
3 of an inconsequential amusement at the way  
4 the world is.

5 And that was the style of these  
6 boys and if you wanted to be accepted among  
7 them you, too, would have to be detached,  
8 ironic, and ----. If you said you believed  
9 in God they wouldn't make fun of you but  
10 they would stare at you clinically. My  
11 roommate freshman year ---- was a Mormon boy  
12 from Utah and he couldn't stand it, the way  
13 the boys looked at him.

14 And he quit and went back to Salt  
15 Lake City and he must have gone back there  
16 screaming and I could understand why because  
17 I see that look still when I go back to  
18 Cambridge. I see it in many of the leading  
19 institutions of our society, this kind of  
20 urbane, sophisticated detachment. We don't  
21 expose ourselves. We don't reveal our  
22 feelings. We ---- a glacial control over

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1 our emotions.

2 We rationalize everything. We  
3 never do anything because it's just. We do  
4 it because it's cost-effective. That's the  
5 ---- and I guess I learned to play the game  
6 too well because I wanted to be a  
7 sophisticated boy.

8 I realize now ---- my life ---- to  
9 be more sophisticated than I am. And I'm  
10 very grateful for this ---- children in  
11 America have given me back something that  
12 was stolen from me at Harvard University.

13 Now when they ask me to pray with  
14 them I do it gladly. They pray for their  
15 mother and father, and I pray for mine, my  
16 folks at ---- are still alive.

17 The kids don't try to convert me to  
18 Christianity, not exactly, but they tempt  
19 me, especially on Sunday mornings at  
20 communion. That's the vulnerable hour.

21 Everybody at this little church  
22 takes communion. Everybody goes up to the

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1 altar. It's a small church. Sundays ----  
2 40 or 60 people there or 80 people and they  
3 all get up to take communion ---- all of  
4 them.

5 Their grandmothers, their great-  
6 grandmothers ---- that church. Everybody in  
7 between who's not ---- in the street ----  
8 Sunday morning they go out and they ----.  
9 It's a beautiful thing to see and even if  
10 it's not your religion it's an incredibly  
11 moving, moving experience ----.

12 Mother Martha stands there in a  
13 white robe. She's been compared to Mother  
14 Theresa but, actually, she's more fun than  
15 Mother Theresa. She's young and lively and  
16 she doesn't just serve communion. She  
17 celebrates communion and she picks the most  
18 troubled children in the neighborhood to be  
19 her acolytes.

20 And children who are depressed and  
21 discouraged all week long suddenly stand  
22 there and just glow ---- in their white

1 robes with the ropes around their waist as  
2 they help her prepare the bread and wine.

3 And when she serves the communion  
4 she holds up the wafer in her hand and she  
5 ---- and this big ---- and I'm the only one  
6 who can't go up there. I'm sitting in the  
7 back row, trying to remain inconspicuous.

8 And sometimes when she holds it,  
9 she looks right at me but it's so beautiful.  
10 She says the body of Christ, the bread of  
11 Heaven.

12 And some Sunday mornings I haven't  
13 had breakfast. I'm hungry and it sounds so  
14 good to hear her say who ----.

15 And there's one little boy who  
16 notices my vulnerability and with devilish  
17 timing he comes up to me right after  
18 communion. I think this little boy might be  
19 the devil in disguise. He comes right up to  
20 me and whispers to me with a big smile. He  
21 says, Jonathan, the bread is good and he  
22 says, paraphrasing the pumpernickel ad, he

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1 says try it, you'll like it.

2 I don't try it. I'm sure I'd like  
3 it. I've never tried it. If I did my  
4 grandma would be turning in her grave ----.

5 So, my friends, there are all kinds  
6 of communion ---- the innocence, the  
7 persistent decency of these small children  
8 ---- to reach out and trust us despite all  
9 the injuries we have done to them, their  
10 ability to love those who have not loved  
11 them, their willingness to believe that  
12 there's some goodness in this bitterly  
13 unjust society, their playfulness, too,  
14 their human ---- their affection, their  
15 hugs, their kisses.

16 To me those are the bread and wine.  
17 That's the only kind of communion I'll ever  
18 have and I'm always grateful to receive it  
19 and ---- the prophets ---- always ready to  
20 be received.

21 And there's ---- the prophets.  
22 They're ---- just like everyone else ----

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1 and God bless their ---- when people say.

2 I just hope that this severe  
3 testing agenda which is coming into effect  
4 now in the United States will not frighten  
5 urban teachers into looking to one of these  
6 horrible, drill-and-grill regimens ----  
7 basic training for black babies which is  
8 becoming popular in America now so they  
9 think they ---- happy with the children.

10 Some of the teachers in New York,  
11 because they're all under the sword of tests  
12 now, it's not Mr. Bush's test. They already  
13 have three sets of tests in the Bronx.

14 They get the Bronx test, the city  
15 tests, and the state tests and they get them  
16 both in math and reading. So six times a  
17 year they have stomach aches and throw up  
18 the night before school, starting in third  
19 grade.

20 Now Mr. Bush wants to give them  
21 another reason to throw up. It's madness  
22 but what's happened, of course, is that

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1 teachers are scared and even the best  
2 teachers, the most competent teachers, the  
3 wonderful teachers, those with the magical,  
4 joyful, spiritually rich personalities, the  
5 kind of teachers you remember for the rest  
6 of your life, are those who are all so down  
7 to earth enough so that when the children in  
8 first grade have an attack and giggle and  
9 the teacher can't resist it and she giggles,  
10 too, those teachers are getting scared of  
11 ever doing anything playful, silly, or  
12 amusing with the children -----.

13 And that's going to be a terrible  
14 loss. It's not just that we cheat these  
15 children of any separate but equal  
16 opportunity in preschool. Early childhood,  
17 class size, salaries of teachers, the  
18 quality of infrastructure of their schools,  
19 textbooks, all the rest.

20 It's not just that we cheat them of  
21 any chance of equal opportunity. But now  
22 with the new regime if the Senate and the

1 House are cowardly and give in to this new  
2 agenda which the President is demanding we  
3 will also cheat them even of those slender  
4 moments of joy and happiness that they get  
5 from a beautiful teacher and that's ----  
6 terrible ----.

7 Well, let me end by saying one last  
8 thing about religion. I know that religion  
9 is important to people in this room and I  
10 know it's increasingly important on the  
11 national agenda. But to what degree that's  
12 religion and to what degree that's rhetoric  
13 I'm not sure. That's an open question.

14 It seems to be fashionable now for  
15 any potential future presidential candidate  
16 to suddenly get interested in religion and  
17 that's not a good reason to do it. You have  
18 to do it because it comes from you soul and  
19 your heart.

20 But taking people at their best --

21 (Interruption)

22 MR. KOZOL: -- particularly ----

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1 Simon Peter asks Jesus how he can prove that  
2 he loves Jesus. And Jesus answers if you  
3 love me ----. He didn't say only ---- will  
4 dwell in the green pastures of Beverly Hills  
5 ---- Massachusetts. He didn't say only the  
6 sheep whose mothers ---- decision-making  
7 skills please us by ---- behavior. He  
8 didn't say only the sheep whose dads had  
9 good jobs and went to college and show up on  
10 time for PTA. He did not say only the sheep  
11 that have two parents ---- sheep. I like  
12 the simplicity of that ---- to me the little  
13 ones I write about ----.

14 I had the honor to preach a couple  
15 of times at the National Cathedral. If I  
16 have a chance to preach there again and  
17 ----.

18 (Laughter)

19 MR. KOZOL: -- I respect you. And  
20 Jesus said ---- Jesus knew what ---- we  
21 don't ---- names ---- we don't ---- by  
22 chapter ---- things by scaring ----.

1 (Applause)

2 MALE SPEAKER: -- for him and  
3 everyone else in the room.

4 FEMALE SPEAKER: About three weeks  
5 ago I was watching Rosie O'Donnell and ----  
6 you on television and ---- in Boston,  
7 Massachusetts, where you taught ----.

8 (Applause)

9 FEMALE SPEAKER: ---- what I'd like  
10 to ---- we were disadvantaged but that  
11 classroom in Boston, Massachusetts, was a  
12 classroom where the neighborhood was in  
13 transition. There were people who were  
14 working ---- and my parents had moved into  
15 the neighborhood recently. That was the  
16 last class that I attended in that  
17 neighborhood, but I do remember the Langston  
18 Hughes poems because you were the first  
19 person to introduce them to me.

20 MR. KOZOL: ---- just the same.

21 (Laughter)

22 MR. KOZOL: We'll talk later.

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1 But ---- congressmen ----. Would  
2 you stand on this ---- Congress ----.

3 (Applause)

4 MR. KOZOL: And now ---- would you  
5 stand, please, also? Thank you, Congressman  
6 ----.

7 (Applause)

8 MALE SPEAKER: Congressman Sherrod  
9 Brown is right here.

10 MR. KOZOL: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't  
11 mean to discriminate ---- my age and John  
12 Conyers and I are the older generation.

13 MALE SPEAKER: John's not realizing  
14 when I was sitting next to you right here  
15 ----.

16 (Applause)

17 MR. KOZOL: We have time for  
18 questions. We've got 10 minutes, I'd say.  
19 Yes, hi.

20 FEMALE SPEAKER: ---- you're  
21 talking about ---- about what we know ----  
22 and none of us seems to know ---- in our

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1 community unless we go to the community.  
2 Perhaps more than programs that are testing  
3 our children ---- programs that require that  
4 ---- go in ----.

5 MR. KOZOL: Oh, I think that's a  
6 wonderful idea. I mean, obviously I'm not  
7 opposed to service programs where you put  
8 people with some advantages in their life go  
9 to help people who don't have advantages. I  
10 have to be careful not to overstate my  
11 enthusiasm for your point ----  
12 misinterpreted. I'm going tomorrow night to  
13 encourage students out in Western  
14 Pennsylvania to do service projects and I'm  
15 in favor of that. But I think far more  
16 important than what outsiders do for inner  
17 city kids is what happens to them themselves  
18 if they go in an open and unprotected state  
19 of mind.

20 On the other hand there are some  
21 programs in an old-fashioned sort of  
22 settlement house mentality which are so

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1       condescending and so patronizing that I  
2       don't think they affect the donors very much  
3       because I can't quite explain it but there  
4       are some types of volunteer programs which  
5       are wonderful and then there are others  
6       where the participants almost bring the  
7       glitz and glaze of their benefit dinner  
8       parties and things with them when they go to  
9       do something good. And it's as though they  
10      remained glazed and they're giddy about it  
11      all and they stick together and they do it  
12      as a group, and they're going to go back and  
13      discuss their experience among the poor. In  
14      fact they really didn't experience much.

15               The bottom line ---- protecting  
16      people you want to ---- good people from  
17      outside and really immersing them in an  
18      experience that can transform their life. I  
19      mean, I've been to ---- and maybe when I  
20      started out, when I first knew Charmaine (?)  
21      when I was a young boy and I was just, like,  
22      27 years old and I looked as though I was 16

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1 then because I didn't look very grown up,  
2 maybe then I thought I was going to save the  
3 world and but I don't think ----.

4 When I go up to the South Bronx I  
5 don't go up there with the illusion that  
6 I've got this bag of grown-up lessons  
7 straight from Harvard Square, sprinkle them  
8 on the floor. I go up there in search of my  
9 ---- and I go in search of my own  
10 transformation. That's why I go back there.  
11 And when I find that I'm getting too cynical  
12 or jaded or ---- too hostile to my  
13 adversaries I go back up there in order to  
14 learn some lessons from those children.

15 They're wonderful kids. The  
16 tragedy is that very few of them ever have  
17 the opportunities that most children have in  
18 America, very few of them. Every so often  
19 some wonderful soul comes along and ---- and  
20 that's great.

21 I always like to speak with ----  
22 the people who do good things and one man

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1 I'm particularly grateful to is a man ----  
2 was in the first Clinton Administration  
3 named Roger Altman (?). And Roger now is in  
4 business in New York and after reading  
5 *Amazing Grace* he actually had the humility  
6 to come to me saying, here I've been in  
7 Washington working for President Clinton. I  
8 don't know what to do about ----. What  
9 should I do? I looked at it as a humble  
10 thing for a powerful man to say to me.

11 I said well, Rog, you work with the  
12 President. And he said but I don't know  
13 what to do. So he did a lot of wonderful  
14 things. One thing he did was to take one of  
15 the children that I wrote about, Anthony  
16 Gramia (?). He's a marvelous boy who's the  
17 central figure of *Amazing Grace*, this little  
18 boy who fell in love with poetry when he was  
19 11 years old, started writing what he called  
20 his first novel when he was 12, poorest kid  
21 in the neighborhood.

22 And Mr. Altman said to me what can

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1 I do? So I said well, I don't believe in  
2 vouchers but why don't you send Anthony to  
3 one of those prep schools that future  
4 presidents go to?

5 So he did and the boy couldn't pass  
6 the tests, I can tell you. So much for the  
7 standardized exams. He couldn't pass any of  
8 the tests and I did what I knew would make  
9 the difference. I brought him to meet the  
10 headmaster.

11 And I said this little boy's such a  
12 delightful, lovable, smart little kid but  
13 you couldn't see it in his test scores.  
14 He'd been damaged badly by the limitations  
15 of the neighborhood, of the school. He's  
16 one of the best students but he is still far  
17 behind the boys who go to schools like  
18 Exeter ----. But the headmaster spent an  
19 hour with him and then he said I want him.

20 So they took him and, boy, that was  
21 tough. Can you imagine what that's like?  
22 You've maybe have been through experiences

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1     like that. That was tough. I mean, that  
2     wasn't provided by a Republican voucher.  
3     This was \$32,000 a year. That's what it  
4     costs to go to those schools today.

5             Remember that the next time  
6     somebody rich asks you if money can really  
7     buy a better education for poor people,  
8     \$32,000 for this school and Mr. Altman gave  
9     us \$100,000 so this little boy could go for  
10    three years.

11            And last spring I had to give a  
12    whole bunch of talks when my book came out.  
13    I did 40 talks in 40 days on the book tour.  
14    The last talk was the best one ----.

15                   (Laughter)

16            MR. KOZOL: He's in college with a  
17    full scholarship ---- but ---- and that is a  
18    Christian act. See, Roger did that out of  
19    religious feelings, out of deep religious  
20    feelings, deep, deep religious sense of  
21    decency. He couldn't save the world, but  
22    he'd save this boy. He tried to save the

1 world in Washington, couldn't do it so he  
2 saved Anthony. Bless him for that.

3 But charity is to damn selective.  
4 It's not a systematic substitute for  
5 justice. You can't write a book about it  
6 ----.

7 Congressman, ---- ask questions?  
8 Yes?

9 MALE SPEAKER: To what extent is  
10 suffering a means of *Amazing Grace*?

11 MR. KOZOL: Well, it has a ----  
12 lots of people but it's a very good  
13 question. It's a wonderful question. Are  
14 you a pastor? It's a wonderful question.

15 I mean, to some degree the  
16 exquisite nature, the grace, that you see in  
17 some of the people in that book that I wrote  
18 with that title is conditioned by the  
19 sorrow, the suffering ----. That's true yet  
20 I wouldn't want to make an argument for the  
21 virtues of destitution or the spiritual  
22 benefits of destitution.

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1           Let me put it this way. The little  
2 ones I know in the South Bronx could get by  
3 with about a quarter of the suffering they  
4 know now and still have transcendent  
5 spirits. I'd like to see a lot less  
6 suffering for the poor and a lot more grace  
7 in the rich. That's my own bias.

8           Yes? One or two last questions.  
9 Yes, hi.

10           MALE SPEAKER: Couple questions  
11 about two programs that achieve basically  
12 the same thing. When I was younger and grew  
13 up in New York City ---- called ----.

14           MR. KOZOL: I remember that, yeah.

15           MALE SPEAKER: ---- I went through  
16 the program and then I lived ---- city for a  
17 while and our schools districts are the best  
18 in the world. There's one school and it's  
19 in the city called Academic ---- High School  
20 and they use that school to -- well, it's  
21 one of the better schools in the ---- and,  
22 like, they sort of extrapolate all the smart

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1 kids from the whole city and put them in  
2 that one school. How do you feel about  
3 programs that do that sort of thing?

4 MR. KOZOL: Is it a public school?

5 MALE SPEAKER: Public school, yes.

6 MR. KOZOL: Well, look, I'll come  
7 back to ---- in a moment. But, look, for  
8 some -- for a child who gets into a school  
9 like that -- I assume it's competitive, hard  
10 to get in, right?

11 MALE SPEAKER: Yeah.

12 MR. KOZOL: For a child who gets  
13 into such a school it would be pretty hard  
14 to make the argument you shouldn't go,  
15 that's not democratic, you know. If I were  
16 the parent I'd punch anyone in the nose who  
17 told me that. So as an individual decision  
18 I suppose it's logical you want to go there  
19 and you go in the same sense that I helped  
20 this little boy Anthony to go away to a  
21 private school in New England.

22 But as public policy I'm worried

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1 about our tendency to pluck out all the  
2 children who have anything going for them  
3 and give them something different and  
4 impoverish the typical public schools of all  
5 the kids whom a teacher relies upon to raise  
6 their hand when you ask a question.

7 Any teachers here? You know what I  
8 mean. You know that awful moment when  
9 you're just praying somebody will raise  
10 their hand. And, I mean, to lose all those  
11 children to one elite school in town and to  
12 lose all the advocacy of their parents who  
13 tend to be the more aggressive, savvier  
14 parents, the shrewd parents, the ones who  
15 are more engaged in things, the ones who  
16 hear about good options, to lose all those  
17 people from the mainstream public schools is  
18 a devastating loss. And that is the deepest  
19 reason why I'm passionately opposed to any  
20 form of voucher system in the United States.  
21 It would be a calamity.

22 And I have to say that selfishly it

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1 would be very easy for me to join up with  
2 somebody like Mother Martha (?) and run  
3 private schools and sign up for vouchers  
4 because we could run a neat little school,  
5 St. Anne's Episcopal Academy, and I suppose  
6 if we wanted to make it trendy we'd say  
7 St. Anne's Academy of Enterprise.

8 That's a popular word these days.  
9 I mean, every foundation knows ----. And we  
10 could be a feather in the cap of the voucher  
11 movement, but I wouldn't do it because it  
12 would be too selective. It would be ----.  
13 We know very well that the first kids who  
14 started out would be the ones that we  
15 already know whose mothers are already  
16 pretty well connected, the same mothers who  
17 fight to get their children in the  
18 St. Anne's program, the same mothers who  
19 said ---- get their kids Head Start when no  
20 one else can get it.

21 They're the ones who come to us and  
22 we look great. We ---- scores and ---- just

1 upbeat newspaper story, but we'd be cheating  
2 all the other students and all the other  
3 children who didn't have those exceptional  
4 opportunities.

5 So that's what I worry about. It's  
6 a triage pattern and I think it's dangerous.

7 By the way, not one kid ---- to get  
8 accepted ---- to show you how low their test  
9 scores were. Isn't that extraordinary? We  
10 tried with our 5th and 6th and 7th graders  
11 and none of them could qualify. Even the  
12 top student ----.

13 MALE SPEAKER: One item, could you  
14 give an opinion? You know, in New York  
15 there's been this recent debate going on  
16 about Edison schools. That is a private,  
17 for-profit institution taking over public  
18 schools. Give me your opinion as regards to  
19 that.

20 MR. KOZOL: I think it's a very  
21 dangerous idea. I'm glad the parents  
22 rejected it. I happen to be very fond of

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1 the school chancellor in New York. He's a  
2 very decent, impressive man ----. Do you  
3 represent New York?

4 MALE SPEAKER: New York, yes.

5 MR. KOZOL: I thought so. I happen  
6 to have known several of your chancellors in  
7 a row. I was at -- I think I could say I  
8 was a close friend of Chancellor Crew (?)  
9 and also view Chancellor Levy (?) as a  
10 friend. I'll be meeting with him in two or  
11 three weeks. But I disagree with him on  
12 that. I thought he made a mistake.

13 I think that it is very naive to  
14 believe that in the long run it's going to  
15 benefit inner city children to allow them to  
16 be used as the clientele for a corporate,  
17 cookie-cutters, for-profit school approach  
18 that would never be accepted for one hour in  
19 any of the exclusive suburbs of America. I  
20 grew up in Newton, Massachusetts. You go to  
21 Newton, Massachusetts, where Harvard  
22 professors live, or to Concord and

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1     Lexington, Massachusetts, where Nobel Prize  
2     winners live, or you go to Glencoe,  
3     Illinois, or Beverly Hills, California, or  
4     Great Neck, Long Island. You propose  
5     setting up an Edison school or a McDonald's  
6     school or Burger King school because they'll  
7     all do it once one of them is allowed to do  
8     it or a Time-Life school or ---- next to the  
9     Starbucks school where they're very alert  
10    every morning ---- whatever. You propose  
11    that in any sophisticated suburb in America  
12    and you'd be laughed out of town because  
13    people would recognize all the impressive  
14    trade-offs in allowing pedagogic goals to be  
15    turned into mercantile intentions and not  
16    just the profit- making aspect of it but the  
17    tawdriness of it all, the vulgarity of it,  
18    the unseemliness that we would trade in our  
19    great tradition of Horace Mann and John  
20    Dewey and Thomas Jefferson because it's  
21    really his tradition, too, trade in all  
22    that, trade in all that for ---- Smith.

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1           I just think that is an  
2   unthinkable, awful thing to do and it's  
3   totally apart from all the racial  
4   implications. We know very well one of the  
5   first consequences of these schools will be  
6   niche marketing because that's what business  
7   is best at, niche marketing. And although  
8   in the beginning they are trying to sweeten  
9   the pill because vouchers historically were  
10  identified with white flight from Southern  
11  schools. In order to sweeten the pill they  
12  very cleverly painted themselves as civil  
13  rights activists and found a handful of  
14  probably disheartened black activists to  
15  front for them in public.

16           So they've got these what I call  
17  sort of heartbroken, wounded war heroes,  
18  some decent but I think misguided older  
19  black folks who will stand up and front for  
20  them in public and say no, it sounds good,  
21  it'd be good for our kids, and portray it as  
22  a civil rights issue. But I think that's a

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1 shameful misrepresentation.

2           This whole agenda has its roots in  
3 the opposition to racial integration and  
4 ---- opposition to basic equality and if  
5 they succeed in getting a foothold in New  
6 York or any other big city they will little  
7 by little start narrowing the niche and say  
8 okay, this is the kind of mercantile product  
9 that we will sell to low-income black kids  
10 and this is the kind over here that we'll  
11 sell to working-class white Irish kids and  
12 we'll flavor that with something that will  
13 appeal to white ethnic pride. And within  
14 another decade we will see the ethnic and  
15 ideological disintegration of our society.  
16 It will rip apart the social fiber of this  
17 nation. And that's not just that one  
18 corporation. I happen to find the people in  
19 that corporation particularly unsavory but I  
20 don't want to be mean-spirited ----. I'm  
21 trying to show that I've really read the New  
22 Testament.

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(Laughter and applause)

MALE SPEAKER: I would remind the members who are here tonight that we will be taking the group to the South Bronx to visit with Jonathan and the children about whom he writes and Mother Martha and the teachers at P.S. 130 on June 19th. That is a Tuesday. We will be back in time for a vote and I hope you are planning to go with us.

For all of the rest of us tomorrow morning Jonathan is going to be on C-SPAN answering call-in questions so you can get that on your radio or on your television.

Jonathan, we have had many fine provocative speakers at the Faith and Politics Institute's forums. The last one in my judgment who was as theologically profound as you have been at several points tonight is Desmond Tutu. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the PROCEEDINGS were adjourned.)

\* \* \* \* \*